

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Wednesday of Holy Week 2020

As we noted in our first reflection, today is sometimes known as Spy Wednesday, the day on which the disciple Judas went to the religious authorities offering to betray Jesus:

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I betray him to you?' They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

Matthew 26.14-16

The betrayal takes place the following evening, in the Garden of Gethsemane, as a result of which Jesus is arrested, tried and handed over to the Roman authorities to be put to death. Matthew records that, the following morning:

'When Judas, the betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. He said: I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' But they said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.' Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself.'

Matthew 27.4-5

Judas's motivation for the betrayal of Jesus is not fully explained in the Gospels. The sum of money itself seems to have been insignificant. It is possible he was disappointed that Jesus's mission had not been more political, resulting in the

overthrow of those in power which many expected the Messiah would bring about. Some have wondered if Judas thought that, placed on trial, Jesus would be forced to provide a demonstration of the sort of power he seemed unwilling to use, provoking an uprising against the authorities. We will never know what was going through the mind of the one who approached the temple on Spy Wednesday.

What we see elsewhere in the Gospels suggests that Judas's following of Jesus may have been conflicted, just as ours can sometimes feel. Hence, in Matthew's account, not only the betrayal, but also the repentance and inconsolable grief at what he had done. From time to time different New Testament writers attribute motivations to Judas, though these are not always consistent. But the picture that builds up is of a man who at the very least was not *bien dans sa peau* – not at ease with himself.

The two 'great commandments' which Jesus gave us are that we are to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. By expressing the second in this way, Jesus draws attention to the fact that loving our neighbour is difficult unless we are capable of loving ourselves. If we set ourselves standards that are too demanding we will always be disappointed, both in ourselves and in others. We may find it difficult to forgive them the sort of frailties that are just as much ours as theirs. If, instead, we can accept that we are flawed and allow ourselves to feel Christ's love for us in our brokenness, it can open our hearts to forgive those around us and walk with them in the light and freedom of Christ's love. Learning to accept Christ's forgiveness for ourselves is sometimes the hardest part of all.

It is conceivable this sort of inner conflict was part of Judas's malaise. Did he have a vision of messiahship, and of his own role as a follower, that left him

angry when they didn't live up to expectation? Did he find Jesus's correction of his misunderstandings about messiahship hard to take? Did he find it difficult to feel accepted in his imperfections? Did all this leave him vulnerable to bitterness and anger – with himself, the other disciples and their leader? Was it, in the end, a fit of anger that drove him to the temple courts?

Whatever the reasons for Judas's betrayal, his life ended in tragedy just as Jesus was on the point of being lifted onto the cross, from where the first words he would speak were: 'Father, forgive them'. All we know of Jesus suggests that 'them' extended not only to the soldiers hammering in the nails but to all those who had brought him to the cross - including Judas, the friend who had betrayed him. We recall how Jesus later forgave Peter his betrayal, in one of the most moving scenes in the Gospels when, after the resurrection, they share breakfast on the beach. The tragedy of Judas is that he never heard those words from the cross, which might have been enough to console him.

There is an apocryphal story which suggests this might not have been the last encounter between the two. One tradition has it that, in the light of eternity, when the disciples are reunited with Christ and the heavenly banquet is about to begin, Jesus is found hovering by the door. Eventually Peter comes to him and says: 'Everyone is waiting to begin. Come and sit down.' Jesus looks at him. The same gaze Peter saw across the courtyard when the cock crowed, after denying three times that he knew him. The same gaze Peter saw on the beach, when Jesus forgave him the three denials by asking three times 'Do you love me?' and three times received the answer 'yes'.

There is a pause.

'We can't start yet,' says Jesus. 'I'm waiting for Judas.'